



Identifying Colors and Ethnicity in Black and White Photography

To 1920, photographers used orthographic film which had limited tonal qualities. But between 1900 and 1920, photographers switched to panchromatic film which had improved resolution and grey-scale tonal qualities. The newer film captured more details that provided for easier identification of clothing designs, textures, materials, and construction techniques. Furthermore, when the photographic processes are known, colors and the origins of clothing become identifiable.

Note: "Clear" is a transparent color; all others are opaque.

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	Clear or white	Clear or white
Light grey	Medium blue or lavender	Medium blue
Medium grey	Light blue, medium blue, or yellow	Light blue, lavender, yellow, or red
Dark grey	Red	Red or green
Black	Green or navy blue	Navy blue

References

- Dean, David. *Beading in the Native American Tradition*, Interweave Press, www.interweave.com, Loveland, Colorado, 2002, p. 22: Chart matches popular seed bead colors and techniques with several American Indian tribes.
- Holm, Bill. "Old Photos Might Not Lie, But They Fib a Lot about Color," *American Indian Art Magazine*, 10 (Autumn, 1985): 44-49.
- Holm, Bill. "Old Photographs, Sometimes You Just Can't Believe Your Eyes," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 51 (Summer, 2001): 30-35.

The charts that follow match color and ethnicity for these American Indian tribes: Arapaho and Dakota (Sioux; e.g. Brulé, Hunkpapa, Oglala, Sans Arc, Santee, Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Yankton), Siksika (Blackfeet), Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Kiowa, Nez Perce, Sac and Fox (Mesquakie), Ojibwa (Chippewa), and Yakima.

Arapaho and Dakota Indians (Sioux; e.g. Brulé, Hunkpapa, Oglala, Sans Arc, Santee, Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Yankton)

Popular colors are red, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	None	Red
Dark grey	Red	Red or green
Black	Green or navy blue	Navy blue

Siksika Indians (Blackfeet)

Popular colors are red, green, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	None	Red
Dark grey	Red	Red or green
Black	Green	None

Cheyenne Indians

Popular colors are red, green, yellow, light blue, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	Light blue or yellow	Light blue, yellow, or red
Dark grey	Red	Red or green
Black	Green or navy blue	Navy blue

Comanche Indians

Popular colors are brick red, yellow, green, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	Yellow	Yellow or brick red
Dark grey	Brick red	Brick red or green
Black	Green	None

Crow Indians

Popular colors are pink, yellow, light blue, lavender, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	Lavender	Medium blue
Medium grey	Yellow or light blue	Pink, lavender, yellow, or light blue
Dark grey	Pink	None
Black	None	None

Kiowa Indians

Popular colors are red, orange, yellow, turquoise blue, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	Turquoise blue	Turquoise blue
Medium grey	Yellow	Red, orange, or yellow
Dark grey	Red or orange	Red, orange, or green
Black	Green or navy blue	Navy blue

Sac and Fox Indians (Mesquakie)

Popular colors are light blue, amber, pink, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	Light blue or amber	Light blue or amber
Dark grey	Pink	Pink or green
Black	Green or navy blue	Navy blue

Nez Perce Indians

Popular colors are light blue, red, green, brown, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	White	White
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	Light blue	Light blue
Dark grey	Red	Red or green
Black	Green or brown	Brown

Ojibwa Indians (Chippewa)

Popular colors are red, transparent red, orange, transparent orange, green, transparent green, clear, and white. *Note: "Clear" is a transparent color; all others are opaque unless noted as transparent.*

Tonal Scale	To 1920: Orthographic film	1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film
White	Clear or white	Clear or white
Light grey	None	None
Medium grey	None	Red, transparent red, orange, or transparent orange
Dark grey	Red, transparent red, orange, or transparent orange	Red, transparent red, orange, transparent orange, green, or transparent green
Black	Green or transparent green	None

Yakima Indians

Popular colors are medium blue, red, orange, green, brown, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale

White
Light grey
Medium grey
Dark grey
Black

To 1920:

Orthographic film

White
Medium blue
Medium blue
Red or orange
Green or brown

1900 to 2000:

Panchromatic film

White
Medium blue
Red or orange
Red or green
Brown

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